



# Woodstock Conservation Commission

165 Lost River Rd • PO Box 156 • Woodstock, New Hampshire 03262  
Kristen Durocher, Chair James Chesebrough, Secretary

March 10, 2023

During Tuesday's Town Meeting, the Woodstock Conservation Commission (WCC) is asking the residents of Woodstock to vote on warrant article 33 regarding the presence of permanent bolts that have been installed in the cliffs and rocks of Merriam Woods on Tripoli Road.

The land was deeded to the town by the Mylon and Ida Merriam in 1980; the WCC is charged with management of this parcel. The land was deeded to be fostered for agriculture and forestry and the deed states that there will be no alterations to the land "unless necessary and desirable in the best interests of the agricultural and forestry uses of the land as understood in those trades." Recreation and public use of the land is allowed and will always be allowed - the land will never be "closed" to recreational activities, including climbing.

In 2022, there was a dramatic uptick in the use of this land for climbing and the sheer amount of human traffic on the land was brought to the attention of the WCC. Climbers had installed a large number of fixed bolts in the cliffs to allow safe climbing and mapped those routes. The land and the climbing routes were being promoted on several websites. The WCC set up a series of meetings with the residents and the climbing community to discuss options.

The results of these collaborative meetings included posting a request that climbers not visit Merriam Woods while the Town and the public work out an agreement. A Land Management Plan is currently being developed by the WCC to address concerns from all sides and promote management of the land according to the wishes of the Merriams per the deed.

The presence of permanent bolts in the cliffs provides safer climbing and discourages the use of temporary anchors which can further damage the rock face and discourages the vegetation on the cliffs to be used to assist climbers in their ascents or descents. The WCC does not disagree with any of this.

The permanent bolts are also viewed by the WCC and the Town as alterations to the land. Alternations include "changes in topography, surface or sub-surface water systems, wetlands, wildlife habitat, or *other such characteristics*" [emphasis added] and "man-made structures such as a road, dam, fence, bridge, culvert or shed". The presence of the bolts and the associated paths and path upkeep (there has been removal of brush and downed trees by climbers to allow access to the cliffs) is not in the spirit of the deed and promotes potential overuse of the land, causing further degradation of the habitats. Climbing on the cliffs has also damaged the moss and lichen that once grew on the cliffs.

The warrant article for the 2023 Town Meeting was submitted by the WCC and requests input and opinion from Woodstock residents. This is a non-binding warrant, but the WCC will use both the discussion and the vote to inform our decision, as stewards of the land, regarding the continued presence of the permanent bolts.

I look forward to the discussions and hearing from the residents on March 14. And I thank you in advance for your careful consideration of this issue.

Kristen Durocher  
Chair, WCC

**Business: 603-745-8752 • Email: [admin@woodstocknh.org](mailto:admin@woodstocknh.org) • Fax: 603-745-2393**

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